TEXAS HOMELESS NETWORK

Testimony in support of:
House Bill 1260: Relating to a study on the feasibility of establishing a centralized homelessness crisis response data system.

Submitted by:
Texas Homeless Network
Eric Samuels
3000 South IH-35; Suite 100
Austin, TX 78704

Chairman Cortez, and members of the Committee,

I wish to register our support for House Bill 1260. Texas Homeless Network (THN) has been piloting the Texas Homeless Data Sharing Network (THDSN) project for nearly a full year. We have secured participation from three homeless response systems covering 220 out of 254 counties or 87% of TX. We expect two more systems to come online very soon to bring us to nearly 90% coverage.

At present, if we want to look at the state of homelessness in Texas, we have to aggregate data from 11 disparate homeless response systems from a survey conducted within the last ten days of January. Also, collaborating with service and housing providers across the invisible boundaries created by the homeless response systems is inefficient at best and, at worse, does not happen. These limitations are inefficient from a planning and service perspective but most importantly, this lack of connection across systems of care limits Texans' ability to escape homelessness.

With the THDSN, we can examine the state of homelessness in Texas at any point in time, and we can dive deeper and look at specific sub-populations. For example, if we wanted to look at where our highest concentration of veterans experiencing homelessness is in the state, we can do that. There is utility in that ability insomuch as that data will help us update strategic plans to end homelessness and influence policy to respond to observable needs. However, this network's most vital utility will come when we can individually help people and households experiencing homelessness by efficiently connecting them with resources and opportunities.

In addition to providing more macro-level detail, the THDSN makes it possible to end homeless on the micro-level more effectively. The network makes this possible by allowing us to have data at our fingertips that will inform case planning, eligibility for certain types of assistance, and connections with other systems of care and agencies that people or households have used in their work exit homelessness. On the service provider or homeless response system side, this network will open up possibilities for housing and services that before they did not have a clear view of due to being shut off from other homeless response systems. Essentially this network will allow us to have an integrated homeless response system across the state which will be cost-effective but, more importantly, more efficient and productive for people at risk or experiencing homelessness.

THN supports HB 1260 because a study conducted by Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless may assess the network's effectiveness as stated above and identify how expanding it across other systems' of care, especially state agencies, may create even more benefits for all Texans.

Sincerely,

Eric Samuels
President/CEO
Texas Homeless Network